



Spring 2009

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Lauren Davis
University of Pennsylvania

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Disciplines

Anthropology

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The Sabbateans and the Search for Identity in Turkey



Lauren Davis

Anthropology Senior Thesis 2009

Advisor: Dr. Richard Leventhal

The question of Jewish-Turkish and Muslim-Jewish relations in Turkey has long been studied as an evolutionary relationship between these groups, starting with the Turkic Khazar Kaganate which, starting in the 8th century, converted to Judaism¹, and ongoing throughout the Byzantine and Ottoman periods and continuing to this day. The formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 created a new state where, in theory, all citizens were equal under the law and in society. Through this relationship several groups have emerged that blur the distinctions between Jewish, Muslim, Turkish, creating overlaps between peoples and beliefs and practices, and also helping to create distinctions between these different terms of identity. In particular, the people known as the Dönmeler, or Sabbateans, through their own struggle to define themselves religiously and nationally, can be used as a lens through which to view the evolution of the Turkish state and society and the relations between ethnic and religious groups. Measures imposed by the Turkish government affected the Sabbatean's internal discussion of their group identity; conversely, these discussions greatly impacted the evolution of Turkish politics. The 1923 population exchange, and the 1942 Wealthy Levy ("Varlık Vergisi") stand out as significant events for the Sabbateans and the Turkish Republic. In the last 84 years, the Sabbateans have changed and molded their identities to reflect their new location and context in society. A mix of Jewish and Muslim traditions no longer solely defines the Sabbatean identity; rather, their identity has become one based in hybridity and partial assimilation that can evolve depending on time and circumstance.

The Sabbateans believe that Sabbatay Sevi is the Jewish messiah. They practice kabbalistic rituals, and observe other Jewish traditions. To the outer world, however, Sabbateans

¹ Braude, Benjamin. "Myths and Realities of Turkish- Jewish Contacts." In *Turkish - Jewish Encounters*, edited by Mehmet Tutuncu, 15-28. Haarlem: Stichting SOTA, 2001.

follow the requirements of Islam, including fasting at Ramadan and praying in mosques. Secretive in nature, not much is known about the day-to-day life of the Sabbateans in Turkey, nor about their specific religious practices. The publication of several new books in Turkish regarding the Sabbateans has sparked renewed interest in their practices and beliefs, and has encouraged some Sabbateans to claim their cultural heritage and re-identify themselves within the sphere of modern Turkey. However, the community remains endogamous and their continued clandestine nature has given rise to conspiracy theories and exaggerated rumors that highlight socially unacceptable practices. These theories and rumors have ensured that it remains undesirable to openly be a Sabbatean in Turkey.

This paper intends to explore what it means to be a Sabbatean today in Turkey. How do they identify themselves? In what ways are they part of Turkish society? Why issues about Sabbatain identity reemerged in the last 15 years? What is Sabbatean culture – given the group's secrecy, can it even be defined? This paper will be divided into 4 sections: First, a historical background and overview of the customs and beliefs of certain Sabbatean communities will be discussed. Second, the anthropological theory used to interpret and understand Sabbatean identity and social world will be reviewed. Third, the comparative case of the Converso communities in Spain and Portugal will be investigated. Finally, the history, anthropological theory, comparative case study, and modern data will be combined to reach an understanding of the Sabbateans in Turkey.

An explanation of terminology is important at the outset, namely, the Turkish term “Dönme,” which is widely used in academic literature and which refers to the subject of this paper. These Jews were followers of the self-proclaimed messiah Sabbatay Sevi, and remained

loyal even after his conversion to Islam in 1666, a conversion which many of his other followers viewed as apostasy. “Dönme” literally means turning, conversion, or convert, from the verb *dönmek*, which means to turn back, return, or change. The colloquial meaning, however, inflects a much more negative connotation. Meaning false convert and apostate, it is also used to refer to transsexuals and as a tool of political attack, and carries the implication of an insincere and inherently impossible conversion. In Turkish, this group refers to themselves *Sabetaycılar*, the Sabbateans. Therefore, the author will use the term Sabbatean to refer to this group as it exists today, and it should not be confused with other followers of Sabbatay Sevi who did not convert to Islam or present-day Kabbalist Sabbatean revival movements.

Part I

Historical Background

The historical section of this paper will be divided into three parts. Part 1 briefly summarizes the history of the Sabbateans, including the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which was a defining moment in both Sabbatean history and the history of Turkish-Jewish relations. Part 2 summarizes the customs and lifestyle of the Sabbatean community in Istanbul, as described in a series of newspaper exposés from the 1920s and summarized by the historian Abraham Galanté. Part 3 examines the historical context of the 1942 Wealth Levy (“Varlık Vergisi”) and explores its devastating ramifications on Turkish-minority relations.

1. A Brief History and the 1923 Population Exchange

The Sabbateans follow the teachings of Sabbatay Sevi, a rabbi and kabbalist who claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. Sevi first gained popularity due to the support of Rabbi Nathan Ashkenazi of Gaza, who announced that he had had a vision in which Sabbatay Sevi was designated the Messiah of the Jewish people. Thanks to the widespread support of this popular rabbi, Sevi

quickly gained a band of followers. Over time, his flock of adherents grew considerably, despite the fact he had several “quirks”, including manic rapid mood swings that would cause him to break significant tenets of Judaism, such as saying the Tetragrammaton, eating forbidden foods, and changing prayer services and fast days.² Yet despite these clear violations of Jewish law, people flocked to join this new visionary. The spread of Sabbateanism was greatly aided by the support of a number of important rabbis, who were all part of the Ottoman Empire, and almost all of European descent. According to Goldish, this European connection contributed to the rise of Sabbatay Sevi, as did the general atmosphere at the time. He argues that people were more open to messianic ideas and prophecies during this period, where “messianism, prophecy, science, humanism, and mercantilism not only coexisted, but profoundly influenced one another and made logical bedfellows in the Baroque mind.”³

Initially, the Turkish ruler, Sultan Mehmet IV, saw little cause for concern from this new religious movement. However, the upheaval of Jewish communities and disruptions it caused in the business world drove the Sultan to act, ordering his officials to arrest Sabbatay Sevi in 1666 and forcing him to convert to Islam in public. While the majority of his followers viewed this as apostasy and ended all ties with Sabbatay Sevi, several hundred dedicated adherents remained and converted to Islam as well. This community then migrated to the city of Salonica, where they stayed until 1923. They followed the model of their prophet who took an Islamic name and became a member of the Ottoman court.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne called for a population exchange between Greece and Turkey. All Greeks in the major cities in Turkey and all the Muslims in Greece were forced to migrate to the other country. Faced with the prospect relocation to Turkey, the Sabbateans asked

² Goldish, Matt. *The Sabbatean Prophets*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. Pg 1.

³ Goldish, 7

the Greek government to consider them non-Muslims so that the community could remain in Salonica. The Greek government, hoping to get rid of any Muslim commercial element, denied this request and said that the Sabbateans were “simple Turks” and “exchangeable,”⁴ despite the fact that Sabbatean identity and beliefs were widely known. The Sabbateans also appealed to the Turkish government, who, despite apprehensions about this new “foreign element, this parasite,”⁵ also refused to classify them as Jews. The Sabbateans suddenly found themselves in Istanbul, and at the heart of a major debate. While the sincerity of the Sabbateans’ Muslim identity was not questioned before the twentieth century, the supposed involvement of the Sabbateans in the Young Turks’ Revolution of 1908, the Committee of Union and Progress, and other organizations and events that occurred during the end of the Ottoman Empire forced people to reexamine Sabbatean identity, and these questions lingered, creating negative attitudes towards the Sabbatean community.⁶

The creation of the Turkish Republic further aggravated the situation of Sabbatean identity. In order to form this new republic, its leaders envisioned a unified society, lacking the complex, pluralistic nature that so characterized Ottoman society. Hybridity was no longer acceptable, and the new Turkish identity, at least in theory, superseded any alternate claims of religion or ethnicity. The Turkish language went through a process of “Turkification,” losing most of its Arabic and Persian loan words. A new universal Turkish history that extended back to the Sumerians was taught in schools, and propaganda focused on molding this new society into a happy, homogeneous state.

This new societal organization represented a drastic shift for the lives of non-Muslim

⁴ Galanté, Abraham. *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi: Organisation et Us et Coutumes de ses Adeptes*. Istanbul: Société Anonyme de Papeterie et d’Imprimerie, 1935.

⁵ Baer, Marc. *The Double Bind of Race and Religion: The Conversion of the Donme to Turkish Secular Nationalism*. Vol. 46, in *Converting Culture*, by Dennis Washburn, 291-324. Boston: Brill, 2007. 308

⁶ Baer, 292

citizens in Turkey. For hundreds of years, during the Ottoman Empire, Jews and Christians enjoyed the status of relatively autonomous protected minorities. Suddenly, Turkishness and allegiance to the Turkish state had to form the core of one's identity. Religion became a sin, secularism ruled the day. In essence, Turkey strived to create a country of "non- Muslim Muslims, non-Jewish Jews, and non-Christian Christians,"⁷ all of whom would identify first and foremost as part of a larger Turkish community.

2. Abraham Galanté and the Daily Lives of the Sabbateans

One of the most useful sources for the daily life of the Sabbateans is the historian and teacher Abraham Galanté, who wrote extensively on the history of Jews in Turkey and Turkish – Jewish relations. His book, "Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi: Organisation et Us et Coutumes de ses Adeptes" ("New Documents on Sabbetaï Sevi: Organization and Habits and Customs of his Followers"), written in 1935, provides tremendous insight into the daily lives of the Sabbateans during the developing years of the Turkish Republic. In addition to his personal encounters with the Sabbatean community, he uses three newspaper exposés published in Turkey during the 1920's as his major sources of information. While Galanté's work remains invaluable for understanding the daily lives of Sabbateans and the general history of Turkish- Jewish relations, it is important to note that Galanté wrote very little about Sabbateans in a Muslim context, instead focusing on their similarities between Sabbatean and Jewish cultures and traditions, specifically describing the customs and lifestyle of one particular group of Sabbateans in Istanbul. The following description of Sabbatean life and culture is taken from Galanté's work. It is necessary to remember that these observations only apply to one particular group of Sabbateans in Istanbul; other groups, with different customs, rituals, and belonging to various

⁷ Baer, 299

socio-economic classes existed, most notably in Istanbul and Izmir.

The single most important aspect of Sabbatean life was belief in one God, and belief in Sabbatay Sevi and his successors. Galanté reports that when the successor to Sabbatay Sevi, Osman Aga, was named, he was proclaimed God by sixty-three people, and given the name *baba* (father).⁸ The successors in this line were called *khalifes* (caliphs). The Sabbateans reportedly believed in a day of resurrection that would be lead by four important families within the Sabbatean community. On the day of resurrection, the rest of the world will remain in tombs while the Sabbateans are revived, reunited, and enter Paradise. The leading family of the four will wear green flags while the other families wear red and white flags.⁹

Certain religion rituals, such as circumcision were very important to the Sabbateans, and show some of the ways in which Sabbatean and traditional Muslim practices differ. Boys were circumcised around the age of 2 or 3 and during the ceremony the child kissed the hand of the group's leader, who had to give permission for all circumcisions. During this ceremony, Hebrew prayers were read.¹⁰

Marriage in the Sabbatean community was often decided before birth. As soon as a woman became pregnant, the baby would be engaged to another baby. Around the age of four, these engagements would be made permanent. Wedding ceremonies took place on Thursday nights. The couple, along with a religious leader, would go to a chamber where they would kneel in front a statue of Osman Aga, Sabbatay Sevi's successor; the woman would kiss his hands and feet, followed by the man. Then, the ceremony would start, during which their fellow Sabbateans would read Hebrew prayers. Once the groom put a blessed diamond-shaped bracelet on the bride's arm, the marriage was considered consecrated. Tradition says that the bracelet,

⁸ (Galanté 1935)

⁹ (Galanté 1935)

¹⁰ (Galanté 1935)

which is used in every marriage ceremony, belonged to Osman Aga. Afterwards, a large marriage feast would be held, during which more prayers were read. Finally, after the meal was over, the bride would retire to her chamber, followed by the groom, where they had to listen to a long prayer while sitting face to face. The next day, the couple would go to an imam to be married as a Muslim couple.

When a Sabbatean was sick, both men and women would sit by his or her bedside, reciting prayers. After the person died, the community would perform cleaning rituals. Mourning clothes were worn for seven days, during which the community prayed regularly. The fortieth day after death held special significance, and was marked by repeated prayers for the deceased in the year of his or her death, and every year thereafter. The Sabbatean communities have their own cemeteries, most notably in Salonica and Istanbul, the latter of which still exists today. These two were considered the special cemeteries for the Sabbatean communities- as long as the deceased lived relatively close to either of these cities; he/she was buried there. Distant communities had their own small cemeteries. The Sabbatean

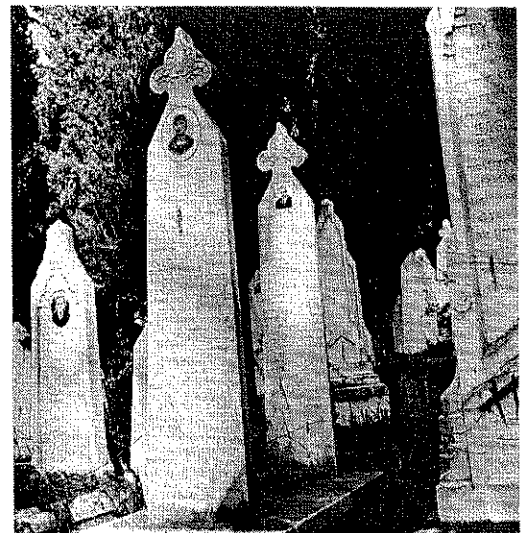


Figure 1: Photograph by Laurence Salzmann of the Sabbatean Cemetery in Uskudar

cemetery in Istanbul is located on the Asian side of the Bosphorus River, in the area known as Uskudar. In Turkish this cemetery is known as “Bülbüldere Mezarlığı” meaning Stream of Nightingales, possibly a reference to a passage in the Talmud in which it says the messiah will come when he hears nightingales singing.¹¹

¹¹ Salzmann 57

Charity was an integral part of Sabbatean life, in accordance with the ordinances set forth by Sabbatay Sevi. The Sabbateans formed several organizations to promote charity in the form of helping the poor and the sick with services such as doctors, medicine, books, and wood. Women figured centrally in these charitable organizations; two of the most important charitable societies were the “Society of Women” and the “Society of Young Girls.”¹²

While ostentatiously observing Muslim prayer rituals, the Sabbateans had several prayers of their own. In the morning, after washing his face once, a Sabbatean would recite Psalm 145, called by the Sabbateans “the prayer of the towel,” as was told to Galanté by a young Sabbatean.¹³ Another morning prayer, called the *Téphila*, used when the Sabbateans wanted God to come to their aid, consisted of closing the eyes, swinging from right to left, moving the lips, and saying “this is the prayer called *Téphila*.”¹⁴ This ritual was recounted by the infamous Karakaszade- Rusdu to a journalist working at the *Vakit* newspaper. There was also a special prayer in the evening, which took place in certain houses. In addition, a group of Sabbateans interviewed by Galanté recited three more prayers which were said in Judeo- Spanish. During mealtimes, a special prayer was said praising Sabbatay Sevi as the King, Messiah, and Redeemer. Finally, verse nine of the second chapter of the Songs of Solomon, referring to a gazelle,¹⁵ was considered a special prayer by Sabbateans. In Hebrew, *sevi* translates roughly to deer or gazelle.

The Sabbateans had a number of other rituals which defined them as a group. For example, they would go to a sea or a river to wait for the Messiah and say “Sabbatay Sevi, we

¹² (Galanté 1935)

¹³ (Galanté 1935)

¹⁴ (Galanté 1935)

¹⁵ “*My beloved is like a gazelle Or like a young stag. There he stands behind our wall, Peering through the lattice*”. Brettler, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi, ed. *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

wait for you.”¹⁶ Women who were outside and with men who were not their husbands, fathers, or brothers, had to cover their faces. However, here is where the boundaries blur, as it is unclear whether this was a core Sabbatean characteristic, or simply an attempt to appear Muslim. In addition, each Sabbatean had a Sabbatean name along with his or her Muslim name.

The customs of the Sabbateans remained relatively conservative. However, Galanté does note a discord between those “intellectuals” who chose to stand against “progress” and remained conservative in the habits and those “social” intellectuals who believed in progress.¹⁷ “Progress” implied working with the Turkish state and Muslims to an extent unprecedented in Sabbatean history. Several rules indicate that relations outside of the Sabbatean community were strictly forbidden. For example, any man who had sexual relations with a non-Sabbatean woman was a “candidate for hell”¹⁸, and it was considered a sin to greet a non-Sabbatean before a fellow Sabbatean. Interestingly, Sabbateans were allowed to smoke while fasting during their own celebrations, but not during Muslim Ramadan. However, anecdotal evidence from Salonica does not indicate that the Sabbatean community was closed off from the rest of society, so some of these rules were probably only followed to a certain degree.

3. The Varlık Vergisi and the Destruction of Turkey’s minorities

The passage of law number 4305 on November 11, 1942 had a disastrous effect on relations between the Muslim majority in Turkey and its minorities, including the Jews. The “Varlık Vergisi” (Wealth Tax) was initially to be assessed only once on the “wealth and extraordinary profits of persons possessing wealth and earning profits.”¹⁹ The goal of this tax was not only to provide the government with revenue, but also to decrease the economic power of minority

¹⁶ (Galanté 1935)

¹⁷ (Galanté 1935)

¹⁸ “un candidat à enfer” (Galanté 1935)

¹⁹ Bali, Rifat N. *The "Varlık Vergisi" Affair: A Study on its Legacy*. Istanbul: Isis Press, 2005. 197

merchants. The Turkish government chose to tax minority groups (such as Armenians, Christians, Greeks, and Jews), because they formed a disproportionate percentage of the merchant class. In addition, the government believed that the minorities' connection to significant European Diaspora communities provided them with opportunities for trade and increased wealth through avenues not as readily available to Muslim Turkish merchants. The law provided lists of the types of people who were supposed to be taxed: large agriculturalists ("large" being determined by local committee"), those who possess buildings which total annual gross revenue of more than Ltqs. 2,500, those who without being a merchant, acted as an intermediary in commercial purposes and collected a sum of any amount, and many others. Article 7 provides for the creation of district-level committees, the members of which determined the level of taxation, "according to their judgment."²⁰ In other words, it was completely up to each committee and each area to decide who they wanted to tax, and at what rate. Article 11 of the law protects these decisions, saying "The decisions of the commissions are irrevocable and no action may be brought against these decisions before the administrative or judicial authorities."²¹ The law stipulated that the taxpayers had 15 days in which to pay the tax, and stated that those who went a month without paying "shall be compelled to work in any part of the country until they have paid their entire debt."²²

Though in theory the Wealth Tax was not meant to constitute revenue, it comprised 90% of the Turkish Gross National Product in 1942.²³ This tax impoverished and completely decimated the lives of most of the minority citizens in Turkey. Documents from the Public Record Office in London note that "There seems to be no future for minorities or foreigners in

²⁰ Bali 198

²¹ Bali 199

²² Bali 200

²³ From notes taken by the author at a lecture at Bogazici University on April 22, 2008

Turkey, nor any material inducement to stay.”²⁴, and that “As things are, it looks as if discriminatory taxation and unemployment will bring about the disappearance of the non-Moslems from Turkey, leaving Turkey a homogeneous nation purged in the Turkish view, of the elements that in the past... which Turkey loathed.”²⁵ Journalists comment on the amount of minority shopkeepers “visibly in tears” and contemplating suicide.²⁶ Letters from non-Muslim citizens to relatives abroad reflect on the incredulity of the situation; one such letter complains that while one Muslim businessman was only taxed about 5,000 Turkish Lira (TL), a comparable non-Muslim businessman was taxed 90,000 TL, even though the Muslim earned twice the amount of revenue. Another non-Muslim family was taxed per-person in their household, bringing their total amount due to 1.6 million TL.²⁷ Although the law stipulated that citizens had 15 days to pay the tax (which was impossible for about 99% of the people, according to one letter²⁸), those who could not pay at least 50% immediately were sent away to work camps, where they were paid wages of 2 TL per day.²⁹ The law also provided a clause protecting those over the age of 55 from being forced to labor camps, but many sources refer to men in their 70’s being sent to the camps.

Non-Muslims were taxed the highest rate, followed by the Sabbateans, and finally the Muslims, who were hardly taxed at all. Unfortunately, no material has yet been made available that discusses how the government or local committees knew which citizens were Sabbateans. The committees were comprised of both local government officials and regular citizens; it is possible, especially in smaller committees, that Sabbatean identity was widely known. What is

²⁴ (Bali 2005 290

²⁵ Bali 292

²⁶ Bali 229

²⁷ Bali 229

²⁸ Bali 222

²⁹ Bali 214

particularly interesting about the tax for the Sabbateans is that it actually reflects a degree of acceptance towards their hybrid nature. They were not taxed at the same level as Jews, Armenians, and Greeks; apparently, the average Turkish Muslim citizen did not see them as such. However, they did not go tax-free like the majority Muslims. In the eyes of the Turkish state and Muslim Turkish citizens, Sabbateans identity remained a mix of foreign influences and Turkishness. This is a far greater level of acceptance than the Sabbateans experienced when they first arrived in Turkey 20 years earlier; it can be assumed that if the Muslim citizens still viewed them with great fear and as “parasites,” they would have utilized this opportunity to deliver a crushing blow on the Sabbatean community, which they did not. While this devastating instance of anti-minority ideology in Turkey completely destroyed the minority population and caused many minorities to emigrate, it also reflects a slight change in Muslim views towards the Sabbateans, and allowed the Sabbateans to remain in Turkey.

Part II

Anthropological Theory

Clifford Geertz - *Interpretations of Culture*

In *Interpretations of Culture*, Clifford Geertz explores the meaning of culture, the role it plays in society, and how it should be studied. Geertz’s thick description of culture places culture as solely the pattern of meanings embedded in symbols. It is distinct from social structure – culture is the context in which people live out their lives, as opposed to being a force in society.

In a section of *Interpretations of Culture*, Geertz poses the question: How can you create political unity with countless multiple societies, ethnicities, linguistics, and “mosaic” social

structures? He argues that this problem is “literally pandemic”³⁰ for new states. People within new states are ultimately mobilized by two motives: the “desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions ‘matter,’”³¹ and the desire to create a modern state. People want to be noticed; they want to secure for themselves a place in the power structure of the country as networks are being built. Unfortunately, Geertz says, there is a tension between these two desires which stems from the motivations of the state and peoples’ individual identities.

People contextualize their identity through blood, race, language, locality, religion, and tradition. The state, however, when trying to modernize, may supersede these individual identities, causing the people to feel like they are losing their individuality. Populations do not want to be part of a “culturally undifferentiated mass” or be dominated by another racial, ethnic, or linguistic community. New states are more prone to experience these clashes due to a “serious disaffection based on primordial attachments”³² Geertz defines primordial attachment as “one that stems from the “givens” of social existence, immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language...and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves”³³ These primordial attachments arise out of awareness, belief, and cognition. Individuals assume that certain cultural features are “givens” and place a greater significance on them. Therefore, these primordial attachments have a power within society that supersedes logic and state motivations. Geertz argues that new states, in

³⁰ Geertz 256

³¹³¹ Geertz 258

³² Geertz 259

³³ Geertz 259

theory, should be based not on these primordial attachments, but most countries do base their collective identity on one or many of these primordial ties. A conflict then arises between these primordial attachments and civil feelings.

When a state does lay its foundation in primordial attachment, a variety of topologies occur. Geertz defines five: 1) One larger group dominates against a single strong and troublesome minority, 2) One central group and various slightly large groups and opposed peripheral groups, 3) A bipolar system where there are two equally balanced groups, 4) Groups of varying degrees of size and importance, but no one is definitely dominant and group boundaries are liquid, and 5) Simple ethnic fragmentation. Individual and group problems vary depending on what type of system they are in. Geertz proceeds to outline Indonesia, Malaya, Burma, India, Lebanon, Morocco, and Nigeria as case studies for his theories. From these examples, Geertz identifies the commonality between all of them to be “the aggregation of independently defined, specifically outlined traditional primordial groups into larger, more diffuse units whose implicit frame of reference is not the local scene but the “nation.”³⁴

Nations need to replace primordial ties with civil ones. Perhaps, as Geertz says, complete replacement is impossible, but he still offers advice to new governments, recommending that any country that tries would need to create a system where the government can govern without people feeling that their personal identity is being jeopardized.

Religion as a Cultural System

Geertz defines religion as a “1) system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that

³⁴ Geertz 306- 307

5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”³⁵ Symbols are models, both for and of. Symbols are what our minds see as tangible forms of ideas, notions, behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and desires. To a certain extent, therefore, it is based in each individual’s perception, though symbols certainly have meanings for groups and nations. Religion, as a system of symbols, is a model of reality and for reality. The role of religion is that it establishes something - it helps make sense of life. So even when a person is not religious, he will turn religion and its system of symbols because he has been taught that this is the purpose of religion.

Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain – Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds

Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds examines the role of people as agents (and subjects) of culturally constructed worlds. They place identities in the pivotal position between discipline and agency: we start from your social positions and go into cultural worlds as a knowledgeable and committed participant. “Identities are our way figuring the interfaces among these dimensions of collective life; our way of naming the places where society organizes persons and persons in turn reorganize, albeit in modest steps, societies; the pivots of our lived worlds”³⁶

It is important to remember, however that identities are changing and messy and interact with each other. Therefore, there is a continuous process of heuristic development.³⁷ In other words, as our identities change and overlap from the culturally constructed worlds through which we move, the simple rules with which we make decision alter and develop. People (and groups) constantly change and reform as people and groups through cultural materials created in the

³⁵ Geertz 90

³⁶ Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain 287

³⁷ Psychology Dictionary defines heuristic as a “rule of thumb based on experience used to make decisions.” For this paper, heuristics can best be understood as the basic rules we learn, either from society or through evolutionary processes, which explain how we make decisions and judgments, and solve complex problems.

immediate and distant past. This process of change and reform produces cultural resources that are “subjectively taken up.” However, no one individual/group can just decided to create any subjectivity they want; people build and improvise on past experiences with available cultural resources while also responding to the subject positions they currently hold. Ultimately, these past constraints are overpowering.

Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds also studies the concept of “real inner speech,” of a person/group because it is incredibly important to understanding identity. Not only is our inner speech “conflictual and endless”³⁸ it is also a site of the previously mentioned subjectivity. An author works within a set of constraints to produce his words. “Identity, as the expressible relationship to others, is dialogical at both moments of expression, listening, and speaking”³⁹ Then, cultural forms are created by the collective, and through these a second world can be constructed, which is unseen, spoken, and sometimes imaginary. Significantly, in this space, external exigency is invalidated. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain examine Mikhail Bakhtin’s view that voices and symbols are socially inscribed and heteroglossic⁴⁰, and still in conflict. There is a “space of authoring” that is very important to the development of identities as aspects of “history-in-person”⁴¹ Ultimately, “space of authoring” is a place where languages interact, but are burdened with power, position, and privilege.

Part III

Case Study: The Conversos of Spain

The Marranos (also called Conversos) of Portugal and Spain were Jews who converted to

³⁸ Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain 169

³⁹ Ibid 172

⁴⁰ Webster’s Dictionary defines Heteroglossia as “a diversity of voices, styles of discourse, or points of view in a literary work and especially a novel.” In the context of this paper, heteroglossia can be seen as distinct varieties within a single linguistic code.

⁴¹ Ibid 183

Christianity due to fear of religious persecution, coercion, and other pressures. In an approximately 25-year span (1391 – 1415), about 100,000 Jews became Conversos and part of Christian society.⁴² Most literature about the Conversos contextualizes and treats them in one of two ways. First, authors are either highly apologetic towards the Conversos, highlighting the forced conversion, “inhibition” and “embarrassment” as reasons for “leaving” the Jewish faith. These authors want to prove that the Conversos’ “apostasy” should be viewed as a necessity. Therefore, for these authors, the Conversos and their descendents should be considered Jews and not be penalized for choosing survival. The second way authors write about the Conversos is by romanticizing them. The basic idea is that the Conversos lead these exciting, hidden lives. They died as martyrs and practiced all their Jewish rituals in secret –remaining “real” Jews the entire time and tricking the Christians. Both of these styles, however, have particular intentions and even political motivations behind them. Fortunately, newer literature discards both of these approaches and examines the Conversos as they really were – some protected their faith, other their lives and wealth, but all of them became part of this hybrid group – part Christian, part Jewish, with blurry lines and messy beliefs. Yirmiyahu Yovel expresses this idea the best, saying it is not as if “a person’s identity, especially religious identity, is a pure golden coin, free of dross, that can be hidden in the safe of the heart and interior life; and as if as person’s life can be so divided in two distinct parts that the outer life neither affects the inner nor is affected by it.”⁴³

As a result of their partial social exclusion and mixing of Christian and Jewish notions, Conversos manifested a split identity, restlessness, and social and religious dissent. The Conversos shifted from being the “other” in Spanish society to being the “other within.” To a

⁴² Yovel 57

⁴³ Yovel x

certain extent, people were aware that this “other” still existed, but in its new form, it could neither be completely destroyed, nor completely assimilated. They were never “hidden” within Spanish society – whether by perceived stereotypical physical features or common knowledge, communities almost always knew who used to be Jewish, and who not. This is not to say that there were not varying degrees of Conversos – some fervently clung to their Jewish faith, while others gradually assimilated into Spanish society, leaving only a few confusing material and linguistic reminders of their past.⁴⁴ Yovel explains “a distinct duality marked their situation, duality that assumed diverse forms, some subtle and some more easily discernible, but that almost inevitably clung to all their identity efforts, whichever way they turned.”⁴⁵ Confusion defined the feelings of Christian society; as good Christians, they should accept the Conversos openly and warmly. However, powerful “identity passions” (akin to Geertz’s primordial attachments) continued previous centuries’ jealousy over economic and social status. By the end of the fifteenth century, being a Converso was not enough to save the converted Jews from persecution. Thousands of families were burned or ruined financially.⁴⁶

Interestingly, some of those who assimilated into Christian culture persecuted their former religious cohorts with just as much zeal as other Christians. While not condoning it, this hostility may be understood psychologically and culturally, by looking at it as an act of self- destruction. Some of these Conversos were so plagued by their duality that they attempted to remove any reminders of their former lives/religion/culture.⁴⁷

To understand the Conversos, we must look at three dimensions in which Converso identity

⁴⁴ For more information about the spoken and material culture legacy of the Conversos, cf. Yovel

⁴⁵ Yovel 58

⁴⁶ Yovel 59

⁴⁷ Yovel 60

formed: the Jewish, the Hispano- Christian, and the cosmopolitan.⁴⁸ It is a combination of all three dimensions, a hybrid form, which gives the Conversos their identity today. Even in the present day, the Conversos' identity exists in the mixture of Christian and Jewish elements in the same rites. However, over time, this secrecy and hybridity has gained religious value in its own right. Hybridity is practiced for its own sake. They are still "the other within," but because want to be - it is no longer a forced designation. Present day communities of Conversos still exist in Spain and Portugal, where many descendants continue to marry in the Church and be buried in a Catholic cemetery, while celebrating Passover and Yom Kippur. Significantly, they no longer perform these rituals and ceremonies in a way recognizable to most Jews. Rather, accounts show that they have their own Converso rituals which combine Christian and Jewish beliefs.⁴⁹ They still practice in secrecy, despite the fact that it is no longer a necessity.

Sadly, parts of the Converso legacy in Spain and Portugal are fading. Organizations have been established to help "convert" the Conversos back to the "real" Judaism, and encourage marriage between the two groups. In a fashion similar to Mormon ritual, some newly converted Jews are posthumously converting their Converso friends and relatives.⁵⁰ However, without even realizing it, many of these new converts are retaining the most important aspect of the Converso legacy: hybridity. Instead of following a Catholic/Judaic hybrid model, the new Jewish converts still practice a Marrano/Judaic model and base their identity in both their Converso ancestry and Jewish future.

The Converso legacy is not just important because of its anthropological value as a similar hybrid society. The Conversos had, in fact, an important impact on Sabbatean history. When the Jews, both Converso and traditional, fled Spain in the 15th and 16th century, many went

⁴⁸ Yovel xv

⁴⁹ Yovel 380

⁵⁰ Yovel 386

to the Ottoman Empire, which was known for its tolerance and system of governance which allowed multiple faiths to practice freely. These immigrations occurred a little more than a century before Sabbatay Sevi and Sabbateanism. What is significant, however, is that these migrants brought with them their language, culture, religion, and customs. By this time, hybridity and religious secrecy were almost ingrained in Jewish culture. They practiced Judaism freely in the Ottoman Empire, but the memory of and the ability to assimilate by adopting another religion and having a dual identity remained. In a way, this community in the Ottoman Empire was primed for a lifestyle of hybridity, so that when Sabbatay Sevi converted and began leading a life as a Muslim Ottoman court official while secretly practicing his Jewish beliefs, many people followed suit. Sabbateanism, in its hybrid form, is a new version of something which had been traditional Hispanic Jewish life for centuries. Hybridity is something with which the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire felt comfortable, and this may explain why people continued to convert to Sabbateanism after Sevi's conversion.

4. Sabbateans Today: Conspiracy Theories, Saving Heritage, and Self-Publications

It is difficult to determine the number of people who identify with Sabbateanism today in Turkey. Population approximations vary from as few as 20,000 to as many as 100,000 Sabbateans in Turkey.⁵¹ More than ever, Sabbateans have reached a high degree of assimilation in Turkish culture, which not only makes them hard to distinguish, but unfortunately can also cause a loss of group identity and memory. In particular, it appears that the Sabbateans have, to a certain extent, lost their dual identity of Muslim and Jewish, instead embracing Turkish secularism.⁵² The memories of Sabbatean Fatma Arıç support this statement: "My family did not follow Sabbatean customs, but it didn't occur to them to think of themselves as Muslims

⁵¹ Neyzi, Leyla. "Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002): 137-58.154

⁵² Baer, 319

either.”⁵³ Yet despite the lack of religious hybridity that made them so feared, Sabbatean identity still remains something to be hidden.

In the present day, technology and the internet, particularly sites like Facebook.com and MySpace.com, have proven to be great mediums in helping to connect communities. However, it does not appear that Sabbateans have taken advantage of this new medium of connection:

Diaspora communities that exist in Israel, Europe, and the United States remain largely disjointed. A quick search on Facebook shows only one active group for members of the Sabbatean community, and it can only be found by searching for the Turkish word for Sabbateans, *Sabetaycilar*. There are a total of 14 members in this group, two of which are fake Sabbatay Sevi profiles, so in actuality a total of 12 Sabbateans are willing to make a public statement through their inclusion in this group that they are part of this religious community.⁵⁴

This greater degree of assimilation has also brought into question some interesting questions of cultural heritage.

Sabbatay Sevi was born in Izmir, and the house of his birth still stands in Izmir today. However, according to a 2007 online news article, the house is in danger of being torn down.⁵⁵ In the process of uncovering parts of a Roman market, the entire block of houses was slated to be demolished; only in the last weeks was the house saved. While this would be a terrible loss for

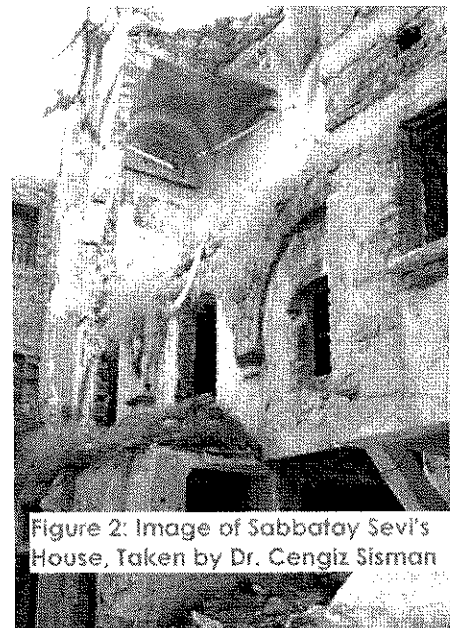


Figure 2: Image of Sabbatay Sevi's House, Taken by Dr. Cengiz Sisman

⁵³ Neyzi 151

⁵⁴ The intent of this statement is solely to provide a general sense of the lack of willingness to identify with Sabbateanism, and should not be considered a definitive statistic. Age limitations, knowledge of Facebook, knowledge of the group, and internet access are all factors that would need to be incorporated in any sort of official statistic.

⁵⁵ Michaelson, Jay. "Shrine of False Messiah in Turkey May Be Razed." *The Jewish Daily Forward*. May 18, 2007. <http://www.forward.com/articles/shrine-of-false-messiah-in-turkey-to-be-razed/> (accessed November 15, 2008).

the Sabbatean community and their heritage, it appears that no one is willing to fight for the protection of the building. Even though Sabbateanism is an important aspect of Jewish history, the Jewish community has gone to great lengths not to associate themselves with anything related to Sabbatay Sevi; as Jacob Barnai points out, Jews were “not to speak about Sabbatai Zevi, whether for good or for evil, ‘Don’t curse them and don’t bless them!’” – at least in public.... In short, the establishment swept the problem under the rug.”⁵⁶ In addition, some Jewish groups still add the epithet “*Yemach shemo*” after Sabbatay Sevi’s name, meaning “May his name be blotted out!”⁵⁷ Muslims have no special connection to this house, and therefore see no reason to save it. Sadly, most Sabbateans also appear unwilling to publically call for the protection of the house, some out of fear, and others probably out of apathy for their own cultural heritage. For many Sabbateans, the house may seem part of a distant past and not particularly relevant to their lives today, but, as Dr. Cengiz Sisman of Brandeis University has shown, there are accounts of the house being used for ritual activity by Sabbatean groups in the 1920’s, 1940’s, and well into the 1960s.⁵⁸ The house of Sabbatay Sevi stands not just as an important relic for the Sabbatean movement, but also for modern day Sabbatean identity. From personal correspondence with Dr. Sisman, the author of this paper has learned that the house is currently under renovation and will be turned into some sort of center by the municipality. Whether the new plans will incorporate Sabbatean history or identity is unclear.

Geertz’s question of how can one create political unity with countless multiple societies, ethnicities, linguistics, and “mosaic” social structures was the same problem facing Turkey in 1923. The Ottoman Empire truly was a multi-national, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic empire.

⁵⁶ Barnai, Jacob. “From Sabbateanism to Modernization.” In *Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, edited by Harvey E. Goldberg, 73-80. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

⁵⁷ Michaelson 2007

⁵⁸ Michaelson 2007

However, after so many wars, treaties, population exchanges, and overall hardship, how was the Republic of Turkey supposed to deal with this past? More importantly, in what context did Atatürk want to place Turkey? To a certain extent, he was a pre-cursor Geertz's theories: he was full of hope for Turkey, and in many ways attempted to mold a modern state based on civil sentiment (but with some primordial attachment). He abolished the caliphate in March 1924, attempting to cut ties with not only the Ottoman past, but also separate the state from the religious institution it had long housed. Fiercely secular, Atatürk embarked on a campaign to modernize and westernize his people, initiating one of the most sweeping social evolutions in the modern world. Some of the tools he used, such as creating organizations that went into villages and homes and taught women "modern" dress patterns, dances, and music, were void of any primordial connections. To this day, the civil sentiments of Kemalism dominant Turkey's political and social culture. Atatürk's reforms were not perfect however. Regardless of all the civil and military reforms he enacted, in the end he formed a Turkish identity based on a primordial attachment.

Atatürk completely separated Turkey from its Ottoman past with his language, culture, and education reforms. In October 1927 Atatürk gave a 36 hour speech recounting the events which started on May 19, 1919, the day he landed in Samsun and initiated the Turkish War of Independence. This speech provided the basic historiography for the Republic of Turkey and for all practical purposes, marked May 19, 1919 as the start of Turkish history. The textbooks published by the Turkish Historical Society (founded by Yusuf Akcura in 1931) claimed that Anatolia had been "Turkified" earlier than the Ottoman migrations, giving Anatolia a pre-Ottoman Turkish history. Ancient civilizations such as the Hittites and Sumerians were seen as part of the Turkish Race. The prefix "Ata" of Atatürk which means forefather, is the

transliteration of the Hittite word for father, which was borrowed from Akkadian, which came from the Sumerian. The first banks in Turkey were given the names "Hitit Bankasi" and "Sumer Bankasi" to help people ideologically connect to their Turkish Anatolian past. The populations exchanges which forced the Sabbateans onto Turkish soil finalized a process that had been slowly occurring for the past 40 years: the lands of the Turkish Republic were largely inhabited by Muslims of Turkish origin. Atatürk seized upon this ethnic composition to create a state and nationalist ideology of race based on geography, saying that the Turkish political formation existed before the Ottomans. He utilized a primordial attachment to the land of Anatolia and to the pre- Ottoman Turkish state. Interestingly, the primordial connection of the Turks to Anatolia is a false one, yet for its role in Geertz's theories, it makes no difference. People began to perceive the connection between themselves and Anatolia, and themselves and the pre-Ottoman Turkic polity as "givens," which gradually counteracted many of the civil reforms which held so much potential.

What implications did Atatürk's reforms have for the Sabbateans? Not only could they not connect with either of these primordial attachments, but their entire identity stems from events and people in Turkey's Ottoman past. With nothing real to connect them to Muslims, Jews, or Turks, they had to create their own primordial attachments for own self-preservation. Making matters more difficult, because of the population exchange, the Sabbateans shifted from one type of primordial diversity political typology to another. In their hometown of Salonica, under Ottoman rule, they, without a doubt, lived in a society comprised of groups of varying degrees of size and importance, but where no one group was definitely dominant and group boundaries were fluid. Under the Turkish Republic, however, they landed firmly in the typology where one large group dominates against a single and troublesome minority. This minority was

conceived to have been the Armenian/Christian populations during the end of the Ottoman Empire/ very beginning of the Turkish Republic, but then slowly switched to become the Kurdish minority. The Sabbateans certainly could not attach themselves to the Kurds, nor to the Muslims, who were very suspicious of their hybrid nature, nor to the Jews, who viewed them as traitors. Their identity began to shift away from one based on a Jewish/Muslim duality to one based in hybridity, much like to Conversos. Their hybridity, however, was between Sabbatean and secularist. The Sabbateans, very insightfully, believed attaching to Kemalism to be the most effective means of survival. Free of religion, ethnicity, and based in modernization and cosmopolitan, the Sabbateans appeared as strong supporters of Kemalist reforms, and some took places in this newly built government. To a certain extent, joining forces with Turkish secularism was a gamble, and at certain points seemed as if it would fail. What they could not have predicted, however was the extreme success of the Kemalist regime and reforms. Atatürk attempted to create a society where race- based geography was the primordial attachment. However, the civil sentiments Kemalism itself have become the primordial attachment for most Turks; one for which today people are willing to kill. Kemalism as a primordial attachment has filtered into the hybridity as a defining characteristic of the remaining Sabbateans.

There is, however, another effect of attaching themselves to the secular Turkish state and government which Sabbateans could not have predicted: conspiracy theories. An unfortunate consequence of the usefulness of the internet to spread ideas and create contacts is that while Sabbateans may not be using it to create a cultural presence, their opponents have. On the video site Youtube.com, for example, a quick search for “donmeler” or “Sabetaycılar” reveals an endless number of videos, mainly in Turkish. These videos almost all carry the same theme: anti-Sabbatean conspiracy theories. Some of these videos are simply huge lists “outing”

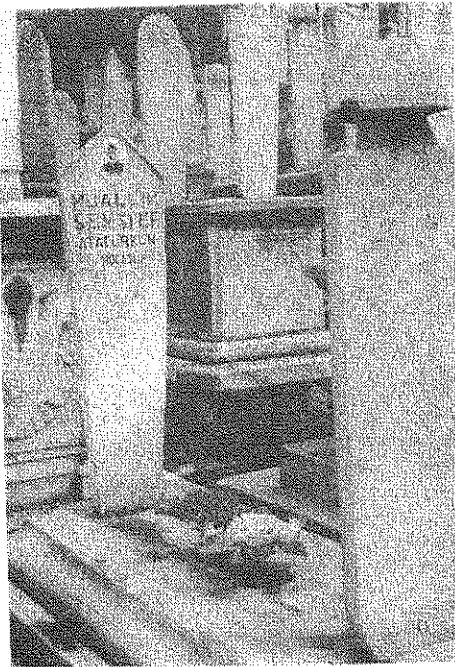


Figure 3: The Grave of Muallim Semsi Effendi, "Ataturk's Teacher." Some believe Sabbatean, giving further claims to conspiracy

supposed Sabbateans who are famous authors or actors, or work in the media or in politics⁵⁹, equating them with Masons, traitors, secret societies, and claiming that they secretly control the media and the world.⁶⁰ Some of these videos appear to focus their attack on more liberal targets, and those who have supposedly somehow offended Turkey and Turkish values, such as Orhan Pamuk. The extent of these videos is almost unimaginable. Some of these videos last for more than 20 minutes, and have had over 100,000 separate viewers, according to YouTube's count.

In fact, these conspiracy theories extend much deeper into the Turkish heart: many of them accuse Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, of secretly being a Sabbatean. Youtube.com offers, on the right side of the video, more videos that are related to the one the viewer is currently watching. It quickly becomes a slippery slope of attacks on Atatürk, going from Atatürk being associated with the Sabbateans, to Atatürk really being a Sabbatean. Then videos of Atatürk start including "claims" of his Jewish ethnicity, and being a dictator, a British agent, and homosexual. These conspiracy theories extend so far that videos start to appear in English, calling Atatürk an "apostate," photoshopping stars of David onto his clothing, and presenting "evidence" that he was really a Sabbatean.⁶¹

⁵⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpnfM3yVxLU> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGZqJ1v8Pyw>

⁶⁰ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfn_MO2xleE http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfn_MO2xleE

⁶¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4z3NazzZCE>; The two major forms of "evidence" are that he was from Salonica, which was the home of the Sabbateans before the population exchange, and the memoirs of Jewish journalist Itamar Ben-Avi, who claims that Atatürk, after hearing him recite a Sabbatean prayer, told Ben-Avi that

The Sabbateans, unfortunately, are not unfamiliar with conspiracy theories and rumors. For most of Turkey's history, and even today, it remains a bad thing to be a Sabbatean. The negative connotations of the word "dönme" have already been discussed; it remains a manifestation of the stigma against Sabbateans for being traitors to their faith. The few memoirs written record prejudice and instructions by the community never to reveal one's Sabbatean identity.⁶² The Sabbateans have been attacked with rumors of incest, swapping of partners, rape and orgies. In addition, a contemporary Turkish author has referred to them as "Jewish Shiites," a clear reference to their "outsider" status.⁶³ The Sabbateans are attacked by every angle possible, attempting to make them seem like the curse of humanity and the group that will corrupt and destroy the world.

The change from Jewish to Jewish/Muslim to Sabbatean/Kemalist/Secularist raises questions in the context of Geertz's analysis of religion as a cultural system. Geertz's analysis of religion helps create a context with which to help understand religion and religious groups. However, is it possible to be continuously exposed to a system of symbols and have no effect? Do people have enough agency to not be affected at all, even a little, when they are continuously exposed to multiple systems of symbols with the same purpose? Can we will ourselves to ignore and forget what we hear in the mosque, temple, or church we have gone to every week since childhood? How can people be raised in two systems that have conflicting symbols? Can they be involved in one and completely detach from it at the same time? Unfortunately, it is at this point where the secretive nature of the Sabbateans affects our ability to answer some of these

is was his secret prayer as well.

⁶² Neyzi 137

⁶³ Neyzi 153; an alternate connotation to calling them "Jewish Shiites" could rest in their (supposed) use of the Shi'a principle of Taqiyya. Taqiyya basically allows for a religious groups to hide their identity in order to maintain peaceful, quiet existences. Given the connections between mystical Sufi groups and Jewish Kabbalistic thought, it is likely that the Sabbateans were aware of this principle, but at the moment no concrete evidence exists stating that they specifically adopted it for their own purposes.

questions for this group.

One way in which we can try to gather information is through literature. In recent years, almost in response to the rise in conspiracy theories, there have been some publications from within the Sabbatean community in Turkey. They are incredibly interesting to analyze, both for motivations and to gain an understanding of how Sabbateans view themselves. What they do not reveal, however, is insight into Sabbatean life, belief, and rituals. We have accounts such as Abraham Galante's from the 1930s, but very little beyond that. We still lack a basic idea of the extent to which symbols from Judaism, Islam, or both act as their models for and of reality.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain's discussion of "real inner speech" and self-authoring can provide some interesting insights into the status of the Sabbatean community in Turkey by looking at their literature. One particular publication/author from within Sabbatean community who has emerged and become famous, not for the quality of his scholarship, but for his ability to incite and popularize (both positively and negatively) views about the Sabbateans.

Starting in 1994, a man named Ilgaz Zorlu, who claims to be of Sabbatean origin, began publishing articles on the history, beliefs, and practices of Sabbatay Sevi. Nobody outside of Jewish circles paid attention to these articles, as they seemed to focus on defending the Sabbatean position as a Jewish sect.⁶⁴ However, in 1998 he published the book *Evet, Ben Selanikliyim* (Yes, I am a Salonican⁶⁵). It is not considered to be scholarly, and therefore has been ignored by most in the academic world, but it is incredibly significant due to its effect on Turkish society. In two years, it went through 7 publishing.⁶⁶ This book, from (supposedly) inside the Sabbatean community could have been a seminal work, providing the world with some

⁶⁴ Bessemer 142

⁶⁵ Salonican is another word for Sabbatean or Donne, reflecting their lives in Salonica, the city where the community resided for almost 300 years.

⁶⁶ Bessemer 144

truths and insights about the Sabbateans and their beliefs. Rather, it is filled with more conspiracy theories, even the one suggesting that Atatürk has Sabbatean connections. Bessemer argues that Zorlu's attitudes about his Sabbatean community and identity is "colored by his frustration over their lack of support for his efforts and by negative stereotypes, possibly picked up in Islamic circles. According to him [Zorlu], the Sabbateans are all greedy and materialistic and populate the upper echelons of Turkish society."⁶⁷ Despite the surprisingly negative attitude about Sabbateans from one of their own, his works not only spurred more conspiracy theories from Islamic groups in Turkey, but it is spurred more Sabbateans to "come out." A number of other works by Sabbateans have been published which portray a wide array of current Sabbatean beliefs. Some argue that they have completely assimilated into Turkish society; others promote their desire to return to Judaism, while others still view their Sabbatean identity as an ethnic identity. Some of these works have filtered down into English, most notably a Salonican cookbook, which speaks extensively of the author's Sabbatean heritage (but only in the English version, not the Turkish).⁶⁸

This explosion of in-group publications is, in fact, "conflictual and endless."⁶⁹ The surviving un-assimilated, and assimilated but aware of their roots, Sabbatean community is struggling to define who they are and how they want to be portrayed. Their space of "self-authoring" is perhaps too burdened with their history, problems of identity, and issues of power to really provide the outside world with any group subjectivity. Works such as Zorlu's do nothing to help preserve Sabbatean heritage, except by making it known that it still exists. These publications have "failed to supply satisfactory answers to some fundamental questions: Who was, or still is a Sabbataean? What has been their role – either as a group or as individuals - in

⁶⁷ Besemer 146

⁶⁸ Bessemer 147; *Salonica, a Family Cookbook* by Esin Eden, published by Talos Press, Athens, 1997.

⁶⁹ Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain 169

the history and social life of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic? What does it mean to be a Sabbataen – either practicing or non- practicing – in Turkey today?”⁷⁰

Conclusion

The history of the Sabbateans is one that is far too complicated ever to be covered in one volume, much less one paper. This paper has strived to explore the life of the Sabbatean community at particular moments in history, ones where Turkish, Muslim, Jewish, and Sabbatean identities were forged through customs, imposed beliefs of foreigners, and political decisions. The forced population exchange of 1923 completely altered the world of the Sabbateans. Suddenly, an entire population questioned the intentions of the Sabbateans, probed their lifestyle, and forced the Sabbateans to retreat within their own community, remaining endogamous, yet gradually adapting to this new Turkish secularism and assimilating. The 1942 Varlik Vergisi appeared as a painful reminder that the general population and government did not really consider the Sabbateans to be Turkish Muslims, but a higher degree of acceptance was shown towards them then towards other non-Muslims.

Now, sixty years later, Sabbateans are once again being thrown into the spotlight by people who hate them for unknown reasons and attack them with conspiracy theories, rumors of incest and other sexual deviancies, and any other slanderous comment conceivably possible. The cultural heritage and history of the Sabbateans is at stake, and with it, the identity of the Sabbateans themselves. As they gradually become more included in the Turkish secular elite, their customs and beliefs fall to by the wayside, and with them, losing important knowledge and cultural heritage for future generations. Attempts by the group to make their presence known through literature has led to some more public knowledge about the current situation of the

⁷⁰ Bessemer 152

Sabbateans in Turkey, but has also fueled more debates and more conspiracies. Defining who, or what the Sabbateans are today is a difficult task. Their secretive and hybrid nature has allowed them to assimilate into Turkish society, while also remaining a distinct group. The effects of Kemalism on the Sabbateans cannot be ignored: it appears that many have turned to this Turkish secular elite culture as a way of protecting their Sabbatean identities and creating a new hybrid identity out of their Sabbatean past and Turkish future.

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